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ABSTRACT

This presentation examines the state of preschool education in developed and developing nations, and discusses how the art-oriented, child-centered approach of the preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, may be used to help improve preschool education worldwide. Although the majority of parents in many nations are satisfied with the educational opportunities their preschool children receive, many are unaware of the opportunities that programs such as those in Reggio Emilia provide for the enhancement of children's physical, social, and intellectual development. Educators need to create a greater public awareness of the benefits of the Reggio Emilia approach, and address issues concerning the adoption or adaption of the approach in preschools in other countries. Questions generated by adapting the Reggio Emilia approach include whether it is, in fact, adaptable, and what specific features are most adaptable to a given culture. These features include collaboration, documentation, parent participation, project work, "Atelieristi" (art instructors) and "Pedagogisti" (teacher advisors). Educators need to consider how the components of the Reggio Emilia approach can be integrated into existing programs, how to bring about such change at the local level, and how to increase parental involvement in and support for this form of preschool education. Propositions to keep in mind for successful change include: (1) change is learning; (2) change is resource-hungry; (3) change requires the power to manage it; and (4) change is systemic. (MDM)

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Images from the World

Study Seminar on the Experience of the Municipal Infant-Toddler Centers and Preprimary Schools of

Reggio Emilia, Italy

June 6, 1994

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Study Seminar on the Experience of the Municipal Infant-Toddler Centers and Preprimary Schools of

Reggio Emilia
June 6, 1994

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The title of this presentation--"Images from the World"--was given to me by Loris Malaguzzi in a letter dated January 24th, written very shortly before his untimely death. I quote from his letter:

> ...I ask you to open the seminar with a report that recalls and widens the reflection on our experience and that explains the nature, the reasons, and the goals of this approach and these interests. A report that should include a comparison able to furnish a better knowledge of the policies and the educational theories that you have learned during your trips and international travels. Your report should give to the seminar the lines of an open discussion, of new interrogatives, of new hypotheses with reference to the social, cultural, and scientific changes. I know that I ask you a lot. But I admit that we also need to have wider visions, and the seminar will offer us an occasion of great privilege.

In the notes I have from a message he also sent me through Lella Gandini, I know that he had indicated a desire to have an overview of "the latest tendencies, issues, and trends in the field around the world, and certainly in the U.S.A." Through Lella he also relayed the hope that this seminar would be a "re-reading of the experience of Reggio Emilia, and discussion about the resources needed to go on

with what is being learned here." He is very deeply missed today.

During my visit here two weeks ago I had the opportunity to discuss this assignment in more detail with Carlina Rinaldi. She expressed the wish that this seminar would be about more than the Reggio Approach--as we now call it, and that it would also be a context for exchange and reflection, to develop our knowledge & theory, to agree and disagree, to discover our differences, to continue to be challenged, to create a community, to learn how Reggio Emilia Children can continue to help those of us who are interested in their approach, and to support each other as we move ahead--in particular, how we move ahead in helping others--through training efforts--to benefit from is being learned here.

That having been said, it has been difficult to choose what to present--especially in view of the fact that so many of you here know much more about the Reggio Emilia Approach than I do, and are already actively involved in training and implementing it yourselves. Our friends here from Scandanavia have even longer experience than we in the U. S. with implementing the Reggio Emilia approach, and we can learn from their experience also.

I begin with a few observations of the "world scene," then take up some problems involved in thinking about where we might go from here, and finally to offer a few concluding points. All in all, you will not be surprised that I have not found anything to say that you don't already know, or that has not already been said!

I. "World View"

My international experience began exactly 20 years ago with a mission for UNESCO to offer training in preschool methods on one of the Caribbean islands -- helping teachers who worked

under extremely difficult structural conditions (space, numbers of children, etc.), but in a very favorable cultural environment, i. e. a culture marked by a deep and long-standing shared commitment to the education of all of its children.

Since then I have visited and worked with preprimary educators on every continent, many times over. I have seen some inspiring practices over the years in many places, like, for example in New Zealand, in the U. K. during the so-called Plowden years, in a school in Northern Germany, and scattered around our own country. I have also seen the very sad ones--like the Child Development Centers all over India struggling with extremely difficult conditions, a child care facility in a steel factory in China with 800 very young children, and across our own country as well.

But never had I seen before any provisions for young children as good as those I have seen during my six previous visits to Reggio Emilia--and I have been in eight of the schools, including two infant centers. There is no need to rehearse here the basis of that statement. You all know it well from your own knowledge and visits. But the main point is that in Reggio Emilia we can see testimony more clear than our own collected works that we have been right all along:

- that all young children have active and lively minds from the start
- that the basic dispositions to make sense of experience, to investigate it, to care about others and relate to them and to adapt to their physical and cultural environment are within them from the start.
- and that these in-born dispositions can flourish under the right conditions.

From our colleagues here in R. E., we are learning a great deal about those conditions. This is not an appropriate moment to spell out those conditions, but I trust we will

discuss them in detail as the week proceeds. I must add furthermore, that a close look at the Reggio Approach shows how to lift one of the major clichés of our field --"the whole child"-- to a reality.

To continue with the world perspective, I have been involved in the IEA[1] study of pre-primary education in 11 countries since its inception in 1981. The data, about to be published,[2] include an investigation of the level of parental satisfaction in ten of these countries (Belgium, China, Finland, Hong Kong, Nigeria, Portugal, Spain, Thailand, & U. S.) with the preprimary provisions for their children. With one exception, in all countries nearly 100% of the parents reported being satisfied with their services. Hong Kong was the exception in which a small proportion of parents were dissatisfied, either because the programs were too academic or not sufficiently academic! Yet, in none of these countries the early childhood experts satisfied with these programs. How can these findings be interpreted? There are at least two possibilities that come to mind:

· First, parents and experts differ because the latter are more keenly aware of the range of possible program features--or potentialities--than parents. Early childhood specialists--like most of us here--certainly speaking for myself--see the typical quality of preprimary programs as **missed opportunities** to significantly enhance young children's physical, social and intellectual development. In the U. S. I see the typical quality of preschool and primary education as a serious waste of children's minds.

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[1] International Association for Educational Evaluation based in Enschede, The Netherlands.

[2] Olmsted, P. & Weikart, D. (Eds.). (In press). Families Speak: Early Childhood care and education in 11 countries. Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Foundation.

- Second, if parents feel truly dissatisfied with the preprimary and yet must place their children in them, they would surely have to feel some guilt. I will return to this theme later.

Kagitcibasi of Turkey, an international authority on these issues, said of these data

> ....in every country much work is needed to educate parents, to raise their expectations concerning services for children, to encourage them to demand better services, and in general, to create public awareness of the importance of early child care and education...[3]

In the case of the United States at least, I am fairly convinced that little will happen to improve the typical quality of early childhood provisions--especially in child care programs--until parents demand it and demand support for staff salaries in particular. But this raises two issues:

First, parents of young children are, by definition, a "transient" population. Their children are preschoolers for a very short time--even though it often seems very long to them! However, by the time the parents of preschoolers become aware of how much improvement is needed, their children move on to the elementary school, and their concerns shift with their children.

Second, particularly in child care--if we urge parents to demand better quality we may exacerbate their sense of guilt about placing their children in poor quality environments, and in our country, parents who work--especially mothers--already feel guilty about giving their young children to others for most of their waking hours. So,

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[3] Cited in High/Scope ReSource. Summer, 1994. p. 10.

what does this imply about next steps? I will return to this issue later.

The only other comment I can make about the world view at this point is that during the last several decades, with the help of many educators, developmental psychologists, and researchers we have succeeded in convincing even the policy-makers around the world that the early years are sufficiently important to warrant their attention. In other words, we have succeeded in spreading the idea of the "primacy effect"--namely that the earliest events in life are the most important ones, and are the critical ones in determining the long course of development.

According to Michael Lewis, an American psychologist, we may in fact, have overstated the "primacy effect"[4]--suggesting that we must worry about appropriate education and experience throughout development. For example, it may be that early neglect and early damage cannot be reversed later on, but that nevertheless, early well-being and healthy functioning can be extinguished when it becomes maladaptive in the context of traditional schooling and oppressive social conditions. Human adaptability may be our greatest strength as well as our greatest weakness.

In fact, Diane Slaughter-DeFoe, reporting on a longitudinal study of children in the Chicago area,[5] told us in Chicago last Thursday evening that the children who thrived best in the company of good preschool teachers were the ones who subsequently dropped out of school earlier and

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[4] See Michael Lewis (1994). Development, History, and other Problems of Change. Paper presented at the symposium on Advances in Early Childhood Education and Care in honor of E. Kuno Beller, Free University of Berlin. Germany

[5] Diana Slaughter-DeFoe. (1994). Teachers as Leaders. Paper presented at the Third Annual Conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children's National Institute for Early Childhood Professional Development. Chicago, Illinois. June 4, 1994.

more often than others because they found their schools uninteresting, if not boring.

Nevertheless, I am aware of a clear trend in the U. S. in preprimary and elementary schools of interest in developmentally appropriate practice(s)--even though we know it is in need of the further refinement that is now under way. Similarly, the current widespread and increasing interest in Howard Gardner's ideas, in the Project Approach, in "whole language" teaching, and in "situated learning" (*Der Situationsansatz)*[6], and increasing interest in the Reggio Emilia Approach are also clear trends in the U. S. today. And it is the latter that brings us all together here today. So I would like to turn our attention to the problems confronting us as we consider next steps in applying what we are learning from our friends here.

II. What should we think about for next steps?

One of the main goals of this seminar is to share our ideas about how to help our colleagues at home to learn from the Reggio experience. I want to take up some of the issues involved in this effort first by looking briefly at the terminology we use in discussions of change. Second I will address some concerns about the adaptation of innovations in general, and third, I will pose some questions about issues in adapting the Reggio Emilia Approach in particular.

Terminology

On occasions like this it seems useful to explore the topic by taking a close look at the terms we might use. Here are some that are often employed in discussions of change in practices.

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[6] See especially the work of Zimmer, J. (1994) "Experiences with the Situational Approach in Asia. A paper presented at the Symposium on Advances in Early Education and Care in honor of E. Kuno Beller. Free University of Berlin, May, 1994.

#1 Adaptation. What do we mean when we speak of adapting an innovation, an Approach or other new practices?

According to my dictionary, to adapt is to make something suitable to some requirements or more suitable to new requirements; to adjust or to modify fittingly.

#2 Adoption. This term is often used in discourse about changes in practices. The dictionary suggests that it means to choose, to take to oneself, to make one's own by selection or assent; to make as one's own--as in adopting a child or to vote to adopt a resolution or motion.

#3 Translation. [This term was suggested by Carlina Rinaldi and perhaps has a particular meaning in Italian--speaking of translation!] The most common meaning is to turn something written or spoken from one language into another, to change something into another form, to bear, carry or remove from one place to another.

(Incidentally, my dictionary points out that in religious discourse translation also means also "to convey or remove to heaven without death"! This is not without relevance to our deliberations here!!)

#4 Implementation. As a noun, the term *implement* refers to an instrument, as in farm implements or tools. As a verb it means "to execute as a piece of work." However, the Latin root *implere* means to fill up!

#5. Transformation. This term means to change form, to change to something of a different form, change in appearance, nature or character, but without loss of value, as in the use of an electrical transformer.

These terms indicate varieties of kinds of change. Which of these terms best corresponds to what each of us hopes to do, should try to do?

Issues in Adaptation in General

Doyle and Ponder[7] put forward an interesting analysis of some of these issues under the heading "The practicality ethic in teacher decision-making." According to their analysis, the *practicality ethic* has three components. When teachers are faced with pressure to adopt (their term) an innovation, they make their decision on the basis of three criteria, paraphrased here in the form of questions teachers might ask of themselves or others:

1) Congruence.

Is the innovation congruent with my current practices? Does it advance or strengthen what I am now doing? I might add here that another question a teacher might ask is: Does this innovation suggest that what I have been doing up to now was all wrong?! (A reaction indicated by Sue Bredekamp in her sensitive account of her reactions to her first visit to Reggio Emilia![8])

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[7] Doyle, W., Ponder, G. (1977-78) The Practicality Ethic in Teacher Decision-making. Interchange.

[8] Sue Bredekamp (1993). Reflections on Reggio Emilia. Young Children. November. pp. 13 - 15.

2) Resources

Will those who urge me to change provide me with the necessary resources (e.g. time, space, materials, woman power, etc.) to make implementation possible, feasible, and practical?

3) Cost-Reward Relationship

Given the cost in terms of time and energy required to adopt the proposed innovation, Will it provide me with sufficient rewards to make it worthwhile? In particular, will the "psychic" rewards be great enough in terms of children's interest, enthusiasm, and cooperation, parents' approval and appreciation, and administrators' approval? The amount of effort is acceptable if the teacher is reasonably certain that the responses of the children and relevant others to the new practices will be positive.

Doyle and Ponder suggest that when the answers to these questions are largely negative, teachers discard the proposed innovation as "impractical." I suggest that we all might consider these three criteria that characterize the practicality ethic before rushing into conversion, adaptation, adoption, incorporation, and implementation of a change in practices.

Adaptation of the Reggio Emilia Approach in Particular

Thinking about adaptation of the Reggio Emilia Approach in particular, here are some questions that came to mind:

#1 Is the Reggio Emilia Approach adaptable? Can it be made suitable to our context? Can it be adjusted to fit our situations, cultures and conditions?

#2 There are many elements that contribute to the Reggio Emilia Approach. Our friends here in Reggio Emilia frequently point out that one must have all the elements of their Approach to make it work. This makes the task of adoption so daunting that it may lead to discouragement at the outset. All the elements that constitute the Reggio Emilia Approach as we see it here took many years to develop. Which elements of the Reggio Emilia Approach are most or least adaptable? In your situation in particular? How many years would we need to get to this point in the U. S.?

- **Physical features**. The arrangements and kinds of the space available in the schools seem a central element of their work. How many of the features of this element can we realistically expect to adopt? How long would it take?

- **Parent involvement**. This is a serious concern we all have shared for a long time. Can we emulate the success of Reggio Emilia along these lines? How long would it take? How should we begin?

Sometimes I wonder if their outstanding success with parent involvement is due to the extraordinary quality of the children's experiences, rather than the reverse. In other words, my hypothesis (and I emphasize that this is an hypothesis--and Loris wanted hypotheses) is that parents become involved--in large part--because of the quality of the

experiences of their children, and that this quality is not simply the consequence or result of high parent involvement[9].

If this is so, then we might try working directly and wholeheartedly at improving the quality of the children's in-school experiences as a way to draw parents' support and loyalty, and not hope to begin to adapt the Reggio Emilia Approach as a consequence of parental support. Perhaps Amelia Gambetti, Ann Lewin, and Brenda Fyfe, and others of you who are already trying to implement the Reggio Emilia Approach already can tell us your reactions to this hypothesis.

It has been my experience working with teachers implementing the Project Approach[10], that children's enthusiasm and eagerness to come to school to work on the projects has impressed their parents more than any other parent involvement strategy used. Perhaps there is a dynamic or cyclic phenomenon in this matter such that good work with children brings in the parents, and their involvement leads to strengthening the work with children. In other words, I am hypothesizing a kind of cyclic phenomenon such that good in-classroom practices engage or capture the parents' interest, provide a context for their involvement, and these parental responses encourage teachers to continue to experiment, grow and learn, which further invites and entices the parents' involvement, which in turn supports teachers' commitment, and so forth, in a positive cycle.

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[9] It seems to me that a large proportion of young children's activities in U. S. schools are unlikely to engage the interest, participation, enthusiasm or loyalty of their parents--as compared to the way the kind of work of the Reggio Emilia children can enlist parents' interest and support. I have in mind here the identical and unimaginitive snowflakes and Valentine's cards made by whole classes of Kindergarten children that I saw this winter. How could parents be drawn into discussing such children's work with their teachers?!

[10] Katz, L. G., & Chard, S. C. (1989). Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Co.

- **Collaboration**. We have all been impressed with Reggio Emilia's commitment to collaborative relationships among all the adults involved in their work. I am told that in this part of Italy there is a long-standing tradition of cooperatives and joint efforts that we in the U. S. generally do not share. How can we hope to or begin to emulate or adopt such a style of work?

- **Documentation**. The contribution of documentation to the work of our Reggio colleagues is also convincing and very impressive. How much staff time and energy does good documentation require? What other kinds of resources are required to yield such high quality of documentation? How adaptable is this central feature for each of us? How much documentation is enough?

- **Atelieristi**. How many of us can hope to incorporate an *atelierista* into our programs? How much of the Reggio Emilia Approach can be adapted without the constant presence of a skilled *atelieristi*? Or, for that matter, how important to the whole effort is the availability of an *atelier*?

- **Pedagogisti**. The pedagogical and other kinds of leadership provided by the team of pedagogisti seems to me to be a *sine qua non*. Indeed, the development of the pedagogical practices in Reggio Emilia seem to be almost entirely dependent on the inservice or staff development component of their Approach. But not all inservice or staff development is the same! What seems to characterize the Reggio Emilia Approach is the constant availability of the pedagogisti, and a

sufficient number of them to make it possible for them to know well every teacher, and indeed, to know every family. How much of such support do we need and can we expect for such services?

- **Three year group**. One of the features of the Reggio Emilia Approach that seems to provide a variety of benefits is that children stay with the same teachers during their three years in the schools. How implementable is such a practice in our preschools and primary schools? I would hope that it might be partially accomplished through mixed-age grouping. Interest in mixed-age grouping continues to grow, and a number of schools systems are implementing that already. We might hear more about this from our friends here from Kentucky where the whole state is requiring it from Kindergarten through third grade.

- **Project work**. Involving young children in project work--namely extended in-depth studies of significant topics--is not unique to Reggio Emilia. It was introduced in the US earlier in this century[11], and was done exquisitely in Britain during the so-called Plowden years (1960s and 1970s). As far as I know, the Reggio Emilia schools have taken this pedagogical

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[11] A colleague recently sent me a book on the Project Method titled Practical Problem Projects by F. W. Rawcliffe, published by R. E. Compton & Company, Chicago, Illinois, 1924! Rawcliffe's words of seventy years ago seem very familiar: In the school where the project method is used "almost all the traditional formality is gone. 'Discipline' depends upon the public opinion of the class. Children engaged in project activities are too busy and happy to think of disorder. The old-time 'recitation' is passing...In place of it, the teacher and children as a group are engaged in activities that are purposeful and pleasurable. The schoolroom has become a laboratory...Discussion, research, expression by means of reports, dialogs, debates, plays, drawing, construction, written composition--these are the principal activities. Research is 'finding out'..." and so forth.

> practice further than anyone else[12]. In particular, they have succeeded in making the "graphic languages" a major aspect of the children's project work in fresh new ways[13].

III. Concluding Comments

There is of course much more that could be said about all of this. I want to conclude with a few points about bringing about change. Many of you here are already familiar with the work of Michael Fullan[14] of Canada and his insights into the complexities of bringing about lasting change. Temporary change is relatively easy! In the time we have, it is not possible to do justice to all of Fullan's ideas. I want to emphasize that they are truly worthy of our attention in terms of the purposes of this seminar.

First of all, Fullan says that lasting change cannot be mandated from above. In fact, he says, mandates from above frequently make matters worse.

> You can't mandate important changes, because they require skill, motivation, commitment, and discretionary judgment on the part of those who must change.

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[12] Some excellent project work was described by Susan Isaacs in the 1930s and 1940s. However, she worked primarily with relatively privileged children. See especially Isaacs, S. (1930) Intellectual Growth in Young Children. London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd.

[13] Excellent work along these lines was also reported by Elwyn S. Richardson in New Zealand in the mid 1960s and early 1970s. See especially Elwyn S. Richardson, In The Early World. New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington, NZ. 1972.

[14] See for example Michael G. Fullan and Matthew B. Miles. (1992). Getting Reform Right: What Works and What Doesn't. Phi Delta Kappan. June. 745 - 752.

He points out that goals in the absence of a theory are mere wishful thinking, especially in the absence of a theory of the change process. He points out that there are many levels of change, and that the complexities are staggering. He suggests that there are macro-level changes, such as in funding and policy matters. There are meso-level changes, perhaps in terms of staff deployment, and things like age grouping; and there are micro-level changes, like the nature of the intimate teacher-child interactions. Fullan calls for changes in school cultures, teacher/student relationships, and values and expectations of the system, and so forth.

Of special interest to our deliberations here, I think, is Fullan's warning about the temptations to confuse changes in symbols with changes in substance. "Many of the political and policy making bodies are concerned with symbols--they want to <u>appear</u> to be doing something bold and new. Often, appearances are enough for political success!"(p. 746).
I quote again:

> Political time lines are at variance with the time lines for education reform. This difference often results in vague goals, unrealistic schedules, a preoccupation with symbols of reform (new legislation, tasks forces, commissions, and the like)... (p. 746.)
>
> While symbols have a role, --- they can attract support and mobilize groups for action-- change in substance requires a lot of hard and clever work "on the ground." (p. 747).
>
> "While we cannot have effective reform (change) without symbols, we can easily have symbols without effect reform...lack of real substance can lead to skepticism about all reforms and efforts toward change (p. 747).

Another tendency Fullan mentions to which the U. S. is especially vulnerable is "fadism"...part of a general temptation to look for the "quick fix," to go along with the

latest trends, to react uncritically to endorsed innovations as they come and go. We here must be especially studious about explicating to our colleagues at home the complexity of the Reggio Emilia Approach.

Fullan offers seven propositions to keep in mind for successful change:

1. **Change is learning--loaded with uncertainty.** He reminds us that anxiety, difficulties, and uncertainty are intrinsic to all successful change....all change involves learning and all learning involves coming to understand and to be good at something new.

2. **Change is a journey, not a blue print.** His message is not the traditional "plan, then do" but "Do, then plan, and do, and plan some more, and do some more, and so forth." We can see these processes beautifully exemplified here in Reggio Emilia.

3. **Problems are our friends.** Improvement is a problem-rich process. Change threatens existing interests and routines, heightens uncertainty, and increases complexity. We cannot develop effective responses to complex situations unless we actively seek and confront real problems that are difficult to solve.....In this sense, effective organizations "embrace problems" rather than avoid them.

4. **Change is resource-hungry.** Time is the salient issue...and time is an important, indispensable, and energy-demanding resource.

5. **Change requires the power to manage it.** For this he recommends openness and interaction among all those concerned with what is being changed. Openness means that we must all learn a lot about how to respond to complaints, frustrations, disagreements, and conflicts, and see them as part of development.

6. **Change is systemic.** Here he would agree with our Reggio friends--that all parts of the system must be involved in the change simultaneously. He says that change must focus not just on structure, policy, and regulations, but on deeper issues of the culture of the system.

> **7. All large-scale change is implemented locally.** Change cannot be accomplished from afar....but must involve those very people who will implement the new practices on a day to day level -- as well as the larger and more distant agencies involved.

I also want to urge all of you to re-read Meg Barden's chapter in The Hundred Languages of Children.[15] She reminds us that many of the ideas we are seeing in practice in Reggio Emilia have been practiced before, only to disappear from the scene in the face of a variety of difficulties--often of a political nature--but sometimes because those involved begin to quarrel among themselves.

So where are we now? As participants and members of the Reggio Children USA group, what should we be thinking about now? What should or can each of us do now?

Fullan seems to agree with our friends in Reggio that all the elements of the Approach must be addressed together. This is a tall order. If we can't do it all, should we do nothing at all? And if we decide that even though we can't do it all at once, we want to move ahead, where should we start? Should we and can we start at different places? Some of us start with inservice training? Some might begin with the introduction of documentation Some with ateliers? Some with long term projects? Some with documentation? But, of course, there has to be something worthwhile to document!

One thought that continues to haunt me is that perhaps we should be especially careful not to call our efforts "The Reggio Approach." even if our work and our strategies are inspired by Reggio Emilia and are based on what we are learning from Reggio. There are several reasons behind this

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[15] Meg Barden. (1993). A Backward Look: From Reggio Emilia to Progressive Education. In Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach. Norwood, N. J.: Ablex Publishing Corporation. pp. 283 - 296.

"specter." One is the obvious fact that it would take any of us a very long time to be worthy of that name. Another is that **if we implement the Reggio Emilia Approach insufficiently or inadequately we might unwittingly and inadvertently give it a bad name, and cast doubts about it, and give the impression that it is a passing fad**.

If we don't call our efforts the Reggio Emilia Approach--even though we are trying to implement, adopt and adapt what we are learning from R. E., what should we call it? Why not call it Developmentally Appropriate Practices? Surely the Reggio Approach best exemplifies developmentally appropriate practices.

Another idea comes from what we know about what is called "perturbation theory." The easiest way to explain my thought here is to take a simple example of a perturbation. Imagine if you will a cyclist riding along a road without difficulty. Suddenly the front wheel touches a small pebble in the road and is thrown off course. The rider falls, is seriously injured, and her whole life changes for ever. Perturbation theory suggests that **even very small items can have huge and lasting consequences.** (If the cyclist is traveling very fast, a very small pebble could create a very large perturbation.)

What we are really asking for in our deliberations together--to take what we are learning from our colleagues here to our own country, our own schools, and our own students--is asking for huge and lasting consequences. My question is: **Is there a relatively small pebble that we can put in place now that will ultimately have the large and lasting consequences we hope for?**

As I indicated at the beginning of this presentation, Loris Malaguzzi asked for some hypotheses. As I suggested earlier, one of mine is that if we focus our collective and

individual energies on the quality of the day to day interactions of children and their teachers in their moments together so that they become as rich, interesting, engaging, satisfying, and meaningful as we can see here in the preprimary schools of Reggio Emilia, we will be shaping a pebble that could have very large consequences:

- it could attract the interest, involvement and loyalty of parents better that all the incantations about parent involvement exclaimed in all our commission reports, and similar dissemination materials.

- it would address children where they are now

- we would all be learning about learning and about children's rich and lively minds and their amazing capacities to imagine, hypothesize, investigate, interact, and co-construct fresh understandings of their worlds

- it would speak more clearly and loudly than does what we say

- **and we would be doing what is right.**

That is not to say that we should not also be working at all the other important elements we have been learning about here. But we have to start somewhere, and our children cannot wait until all the elements are in place.

I suggest also that we should take a developmental approach--to ourselves and to the teachers to whom we are responsible[16]. We must also be concerned and sensitive to

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[16] See Chapter 15, "Helping Others with their Teaching." In L. G. Katz. (In press). Talks with Teachers of Young Children: A Collection. Norwood, N. J.: Ablex Publishing Co.

where their zones of proximal development (ZPD)! Note that even though most of us use Vygotsky's ZPD construct, he Vygotsky did not co-construct it with us, nor we with him! However, once we were exposed to the ZPD construct it helped us to "learn" what we already knew, perhaps intuitively from our own direct experience. The ZPD construct helps us to *make sense of our own experience*-- and, in my view, one of the main priorities of our work with young children is to help them make better, deeper, and more accurate sense of their own experience[17]. I believe our work with our students can be approached in a very similar way. Furthermore, if it is true that one of the important responsibilities of a teacher is to "educate the attention" of children[18], then perhaps we can start by "educating the attention" of our colleagues, teachers, and students, just as our friends in Reggio Emilia have so carefully been educating ours.

Finally, let us keep in mind the concerns of our colleagues here. As Carlina Rinaldi put it to me--in her usual thoughtful way: her concern is that "we see the Reggio Emilia experience and practices together as a treasure that we have in common, and we must be careful to look at it with love, respect, and care."

We are all deeply indebted to our colleagues in Reggio Emilia for showing us again and again what is possible when a whole community is deeply committed to its children. They are such a powerful, "strong"--as they say--inspiration to all of us. They help us to keep at it and not to give up. Their work is a challenge to the whole field--around the

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17 See Chapter 7, "Pedagogical Issues in Early Childhood Education." In L. G. Katz. (In press). Talks with Teachers of Young Children: A Collection. Norwood, N. J.: Ablex Publishing Co.

18 See Prawat, R. S. (1993). The Value of Ideas: Problems Versus Possibilities in Learning. Educational Researcher. August-September, pp. 5 - 16.

whole world--the challenge to provide early childhood education that is worthy of all our children.